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The Guide to Learning Series

LEARNING THE VALUE OF DISCIPLINE

Mayan Revelation Number 277

Monograph Seven

The Importance of Discipline

The Discipline of Reading

The Discipline of Meditation

The Discipline of Prayer

The Rewards of Discipline



ELOVED PERFECTOR:

This is an age when doubts concerning the nature of God and the meaning of life contribute to feelings of insecurity, and insecurity leads to a struggle for false satisfactions. All of us long for personal happiness and for a daily awareness of Divine Power in our lives, but they often seem elusive. The truth we must keep before us is that the life we earnestly desire does not depend upon circumstances, but upon ourselves. God is willing to give us knowledge of His nature, and strength to achieve personal victories, but we seldom make a sustained effort to accept His gifts.

In this Lesson we will discover the importance of personal discipline to the full and abundant life. We will examine certain of the disciplines which have offered the key to radiant daily living.

You are aware that if you are to develop skill as a gardener, or as one who plays any of the games of skill, you must supplement your natural ability with constant training. In a similar manner, if you are to gain spiritual certainty and power, you must shape your mind and your personality by discipline.

Discipline of the mind and body fosters achievement. All of us recognize this principle as valid. The world hailed Jonas Salk when the discovery of a successful polio vaccine was announced. Many of us failed to note the statement of Dr. Salk when he declared, "We tried 2473 serums before we found the right one." The eventual victory was achieved after the practice of intense discipline, which made him willing to accept numerous defeats.

After the first American orbital flight was postponed for the ninth time, a psychiatrist suggested that John Glenn ought to be replaced as the astronaut because his mind and body had been subjected to so much strain that it might lead to a breakdown. Colonel Glenn replied, "What does a psychiatrist in Illinois know about me? I have disciplined myself to accept uncertainty and defeat. That's my job."

Discipline is the price we pay to acquire skill in any field of endeavor. The principle applies to animals as well as to human beings. Recent pictures from Kenya, in Africa, showed a baby elephant learning to enter a stream and to roll over in the water. It was first necessary to overcome a natural fear of the water. When the baby finally entered the stream and tried to roll over, the mother elephant had to come to his rescue. The camera recorded persistent attempts over a period of several days before the skill was perfected.

Discipline is no less necessary to personal advancement. Don't look for a simple answer to your desire for perfection. Recognize that you have a part in developing the skills that are inherent in you. You will gain victory if you are willing to pay the price of discipline. Before we proceed with the Lesson, let us earnestly repeat the words of the following PRAYER:

Dear Lord, save us from the temptation to expect that

Thou wilt give us every gift without our efforts. Give us strength to pay the price of discipline in realizing the full life which Thou hast in store for us. Help us to use it faithfully this day so that we may claim Thy treasures. In Jesus' name. Amen.



THE DISCIPLINE OF READING

In a day when we have constant appeal to the eye through television, and to the ear through radio, it is important for us to recognize the importance of books to the growing personality. There is no substitute for the printed page.

In every group of persons where discussion centers upon the development of the mind and personality, conversation always returns to the place of reading in the experience of growth. You will find people asking, "What have you been reading recently? What books have helped you most? What magazine articles have stimulated your thinking?" It is evident that there is no adequate substitute for the values that come from the daily discipline of reading.

To read regularly and creatively requires discipline. It is easy to yield to the temptation to allow our thoughts to be moulded merely by what we see and hear on the screen and over the air waves. We could grant the value of visual images if they were not so frequently shaped by a desire to have the observer BUY something rather than BE something.

If you are concerned about personal mastery in a day when it is easy to fall victim to mediocrity, you should take time regularly to read books that deal with self-help and personality growth. Such books are of comparatively recent origin. The trend began with three works that have come to be accepted as masterpieces in the field. The first was Dale Carnegie's HOW TO WIN FRIENDS AND INFLUENCE PEOPLE. Shortly afterward, Rabbi Leibman published his PEACE OF MIND. This was followed by Norman Vincent Peale's THE POWER OF POSITIVE THINKING. Each of these profited by the growing interest in psychology as a science. They endeavored to relate the discoveries of modern psychology to the practical problems that we face in our daily lives. Every individual who is concerned with personality development should be acquainted with these books.

Be alert to acquire volumes that add to your knowledge of yourself, and of the forces that contribute to or prey upon the serenity of your mind. Each year additional books come from the presses and they have profited from additional psychological insights.

Yet you will need to be selective. Some books in this field are based upon spurious information. Some suffer from a humanistic interpretation of personality, and totally lack a spiritual basis for man's origin and development. A materialistic interpretation of man always neglects those factors that are essential to enduring happiness.

In spite of the charlatans who have invaded the field of self-help, you will want to spend a portion of every day with such books. They add to our

understanding of both our conscious and unconscious selves.

I.

Self-help books are never a substitute for the Bible. Indeed, the Bible is the supreme self-help book of the ages. It adds an essential element to personality development. It links the eager seeker with a Divine Power that is made real, and which is available for daily living.

The evidences of the importance of the Bible to individual lives and to our society are so compelling that no opposing point of view will stand scrutiny. Even one who ridicules the Bible must be impressed by the tributes which have been paid to this book by leaders of Western civilization during the past several centuries.

George Washington said: "It is impossible to govern the world or our own natures rightly without God and the Bible."

Or Immanuel Kant: "The existence of the Bible as a book for the people is the greatest benefit which the human race has ever experienced."

Or John Quincy Adams: "The first and almost the only book deserving of universal attention is the Bible."

Or the scientist Robert Millikan: "Intimate knowledge of the Bible is an indispensable qualification for a well-educated man."

Or the psychologist Carl Jung: "I recommend to my patients that they read the Bible to help them understand themselves and their problems."

It is inevitable that everyone who reads the Bible will experience certain periods when the reading seems unrewarding. You may entertain thoughts that the Bible appears to belong to an earlier age, and has little relevance for our day. Many passages - even entire books - seem to have neither a definite message nor instruction concerning problems that people face in this generation. William A. Smart suggested that to understand the contents of the Bible one should imagine a person binding together in one volume "a life of Augustine, some national pure food laws, some private correspondence, a hymn book, a history of the United States, sermons by Phillips Brooks, Poor Richard's Almanac, the criminal code of the state, a play by Shakespeare, a prediction of the end of the world, and one of Emerson's essays."

The content is varied. It does not appeal equally to all people, nor does it answer the particular needs of a person's life on every page. Yet it speaks constantly of a Divine Power all of us need, if we are to live victoriously. The majesty of expression of the Bible gives the reader a feeling that here are words of permanence and dependability. Its revelation of the nature of God is what we yearn to possess. Its people mirror the problems, the weaknesses, and the virtues that are found in us. The delight of the Bible is always new to one who approaches it with an expectant mind. A familiar passage glows with new meaning when we approach it in a different mood.

Accept the Bible as a practical guide to personality development even if

you are not concerned with knowing what it says about the nature of God. If you read it at first from a sense of duty, then do it for that reason. As you grow in understanding you will find that you turn to its pages with eager expectation. You share a spiritual quest for meaning and personal victory with millions of other men and women whenever you turn to the Bible for the guidance and inspiration that you need.

II.

When we discipline ourselves to read creatively we must make a place for the spiritual classics. Not all of the literature of the religions other than Christianity is of equal value, but a number of them are rewarding in the insights that they give into the problems we face every day.

Christian writings that deal with the inner life go back to the first century. Seekers for spiritual truths have always felt prompted to record for future generations the story of the search for wholeness. Often we receive help when we examine the method they followed, and always we are rewarded by the spiritual discoveries they made.

It should be obvious that not all writings are of equal value. As you read day by day you may find two or three of the classics which seem to speak to your individual need. You may want to place such a book close by your Bible and your self-help publications, and frequently turn to it as a source of inspiration and help.

The Confessions of Augustine has exerted a greater influence in shaping the thinking of other devotional writers than any book other than the Bible. It is the account of an intense search for spiritual truth. In many respects it is as contemporary as the books that are published in this century. It deals with the pull of evil upon human life, and with the means by which faith purifies the mind and heart of the seeker. Often the reading is difficult. Only a persistent student will follow the slow transformation of the young man who was a victim of dissipation, luxury and selfishness, to a life that came completely under the control of the will of God.

Not as well known as Augustine, Ignatius Loyola was no less influential in shaping the disciplines we accept today as basic to the Christian life. His Spiritual Exercises is the record of one month's daily disciplines. Many of the instructions are stern and difficult to follow. They deal with ideas that are designed to purge the life of the seeker of the pull of worldliness, and to open his mind to the inflow of Divine Power.

Thomas a' Kempis' The Imitation of Christ is a book of personal instructions for daily living. It reveals nothing of the personal life of the writer. Yet the instructions suggest that the author had an acquaintance with many of the principles of modern psychology long before psychological methods were recognized as significant. One of the reasons for its wide acceptance is that it can be picked up at any moment, and read at random. It deals with basic rules and principles for daily living.

Of the numerous spiritual classics that came out of the middle ages, Francis de Sales' Introduction to the Devout Life is perhaps the most valuable for reading in this generation. Most of the earlier classics have to be considered in

the light of the fact that they were designed for people who were willing to go apart from society in order to live the perfect life. They made their appeal particularly to monks who spent their days in a monastery. On the other hand, Francis de Sales wrote for men and women who lived and worked in a secular society. He deals with the same problems we face when we endeavor to keep our spiritual balance amid the pressures of the world around us. He brought something entirely new to the concept of the spiritual life when he spoke approvingly of Elizabeth of Hungary, who engaged in worldly pursuits such as games and dancing. His approach is helpful for all who face a daily struggle with the problems and affairs of the world around us.

In the twentieth century a number of writers have offered books that deal both with personal problems and with spiritual insights. Evelyn Underhill, Rufus Jones, Thomas Kelly, Detrich Bonhoffer, Stanley Jones and others have steeped themselves in the insights of contemporary psychology. They offer a spiritual link between the victim of fear, doubt, and anxiety, and the God who is always willing to help those who turn to Him.

Take time for daily reading. You will lose a treasure which cannot be unearthed in any other way if you neglect the insights that have come from the greatest minds of the ages.

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THE DISCIPLINE OF MEDITATION

Few of us achieve a triumphant personal life without a well-developed plan for daily meditation and prayer. Just as there can be no religion without a concept of God, so there can be no victory in our daily lives without the discipline of meditation and prayer.

Spiritual growth comes as we master the laws of meditation. The lessons are often difficult and demanding. There is no easy road to a close fellowship with God, and to the appropriation of the power that He offers to those who seek Him.

Finding adequate time is a problem of first importance when we endeavor to live by this discipline. We assume that we are busier in this generation than people were in an earlier age. It is true that we have more places to go and more numerous demands upon our attention, but the problem of adequate time for meditation and prayer has always bothered seekers for the full life. In the eighteenth century William Law wrote of those who poorly perform their devotions when they are always in a hurry.

People in every century have complained that they did not have enough time. Even in a monastery Benedict groaned because he did not have time for his devotions.

Earnestly consider what is most important in life. Rearrange your daily schedule so you have a period set aside for the practices that will still your worried mind, and stretch your spirit. You will find time for meditation and prayer if you are convinced that fellowship with God is more important than thirty minutes of additional sleep, or a long conversation around the luncheon table.

You will find this discipline difficult when first you begin. It demands that the body and the mind turn away from that which is comfortable and easy. It requires that you rebuke thoughts of weariness. It calls for stern handling of our shifting moods. It calls for us to turn away from the temptation to postpone until tomorrow what we should do today.

As the years pass the world grows noisier. The roar of machinery engulfs the factory worker. When he leaves the office he is surrounded by the roar of traffic. He is greeted in his home by the grinding sounds of the television commercials. Even when he tries to sleep he is engulfed by noise. Silence is alien and frightening to a majority of men. Most of us are so accustomed to the noise of the world that we are afraid to be silent.

Silence is a characteristic of the Almighty. Until we develop the discipline of silence we shall never have first-hand knowledge of Him. The Bible expresses this idea in many passages. "My soul, be thou silent before God." "Be still, and know that I am God." "The Lord is in His holy temple, let all the earth keep silence before Him."

Silence is the doorway to unspoken prayer. Sit still and obliterate all strenuous striving. Let your mind become accustomed to the vast area of silence that is beyond our noisy world. Don't be discouraged if you find that this accomplishment is difficult. Active people have always found that silence can be disturbing. You will be discouraged at first by distractions both from outside you and from within you. From outside come the chimes of the clock, or even the ticking of a watch. From within come the pressing thoughts of regret because of what you have done, or of what you have left undone. But persevere. After a time silence will seem like a golden wave that brings you the consciousness of God's presence.

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THE DISCIPLINE OF PRAYER

Meditation requires also that we share the adventure of prayer. Reading helps us to understand the nature of God and the function of divine laws, but prayer enables us to have fellowship with God.

Sometimes it is easy to pray. When life is pleasant and trouble-free, God seems very near. We can talk with Him easily and with confidence. But prayer is not always like that. Sometimes it requires stern discipline of the mind and body. The idea that prayer will always be enjoyable and easy is a strange misunderstanding. We do not expect it in other areas of our lives. A musician, author, or even a gardener, practices his art whether he feels like it or not. We must assume that prayer will often require discipline, that prayer may seem a drudgery.

Often we assume that prayer is real only if we can prove that our prayers were answered in accord with our petitions. Ralph Waldo Emerson took a mature position when he said in an essay, "All your prayers are answered; sometimes

'yes'; sometimes 'no'; and sometimes 'wait'."

We often receive the greatest help from prayer when we are less concerned with getting our desires than we are to learn God's purpose for our lives. Prayer is not a tool to shape God's plan, but an instrument that enables us to grasp the will of God, and to appropriate the peace and the power of God which help us face the moments of stress.

It is important to abide by certain basic rules if we are to practice the discipline of meditation.

- First: Keep regularly at it. Make a time in your schedule for devotional reading and prayer every day, however busy you appear to be. The busiest people have frequently been those who were most vital in their spiritual life.
- Second: Try to find a place where you can be alone. It may be in a corner of a house, or in a room at the office at lunch hour. We need to shut out the threatening distractions by getting apart and alone. Of course, we should remember that much of our devotional reading can be done on a bus or train.
- Third: Pray intelligently. Make room for praise and thanksgiving to the God who supplies your every need. Practice the art of being silent before God, considering His greatness and His goodness.
- Fourth: Provide yourself with the tools you need in books, including the Bible, which will enable you to receive the insight of other pilgrims who have faced your problems, and who have found their way to the light.

Most of us are aware that we ought to develop the discipline of meditation. Our failure stems often from the fact that God loves us, and blesses us, even when we fail to think about Him. This tends to weaken our determination to seek His presence through regular periods of meditation. The spiritually sensitive person revolts against the selfishness of accepting so much without pausing to worship and to praise. Moreover, we miss the greater blessings God is seeking to give to those who look to Him in every hour of need.

You can begin today to share this adventure. Forget the failure of the past when you felt that God was silent before your pleas. Seek Him with your whole heart and mind. Open your life to the inflowing of His grace. You will be amazed at the change it will bring to your life.

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THE REWARDS OF DISCIPLINE

When we learn how to discipline ourselves we qualify for rewards that elude those who are satisfied to live every day on the lower levels, where the

senses provide the appealing satisfactions.

It should be enough for us to know that these disciplines are basic for one who endeavors to be faithful to himself and to his God. But the rewards are real, and certain. When we walk in the disciplined way, our attitudes are changed, and our life is enriched.

Many who have persevered in the disciplined way testify that they find help to dispel doubt, and to undergird faith. Without them the answers to the questions about the meaning of life remain a matter of speculation. We tend to argue as to whether or not there is a God, but we fail to come to know Him. Though many scientists offer factual reasons why they believe in a Divine Being, it remains for the philosopher to provide acceptable reasons why there must be a Creator to explain the Universe. Yet the philosopher must always point to faith as the final source of assurance. And faith has its origin in discipline. When we list the names of those throughout the ages who gave evidence that they had close fellowship with God, the list is made up almost entirely of those who disciplined themselves to seek for and understand the works of God.

Observance of these disciplines will give significance and meaning to your daily life. You will better understand the purposes of God for your daily life and for your world. Without vital faith we easily conclude that man's destiny is shrouded in darkness and despair. But discipline gives knowledge of God's everlasting plan for your personal life. It helps you to see life as a whole.

There is a further reward that is gained by one who lives by daily disciplines. We learn to set our purposes in line with God's plan for His creation. We feel restless when we allow hate and bitterness to replace God's laws of love as a means to determine our relations with others. We gain insights into the question of how we may fulfill our obligations to God and to those about us. The disciplined life links us with men and women in every age who found purpose in life because they found God.

When we read and meditate upon Divine Truth we share a joyous freedom in the midst of the most trying conditions. The reason for this is clear: To know God, and to sense His love for us, relieves us of many of the tensions that make others want to escape the obligations of life. We do not close our eyes to the problems that confront us in the twentieth century, but we are determined to use our strength and vision to help correct the evils in our society. We are no less aware of the problems around us, but we are confident that there is a destiny that shapes our ends.

Start today to follow the disciplines that contribute to full and abundant living. Avoid the distractions that tempt you to take the easy way. Use the moments that are entrusted to you as a precious treasure. Seek God earnestly, and He will reveal Himself to you. Walk in His way, and you will find an abiding joy in daily living.

its best. The adventure is offered to all who will courageously embark upon it.



AFFIRMATION

I will begin today a life of disciplined search
- reading that which will stretch my vision,
meditating and praying to deepen my awareness
of God's purposes for me and for my world.

Blessings,

YOUR INSTRUCTOR.